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International Literary Connections. The Early Stage of F.M. Dostoevsky’s Work Reception in Germany Tomsk Polytechnic University

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Abstract

The paper describes the specificity of international literary connections as a powerful tool for global studies. The main goal of the article is to reveal and describe how information can be shared between cultures and nations. The results of these investigations explain the key tendencies of Dostoevsky’s early reception in Germany, and determine the main features in F.M. Dostoevsky’s work interpretation. The article summarises the reviews of Dostoevsky’s works placed in Germany literary periodicals. In this paper cultural environment of the time is described and complete view of the factors determining Dostoevsky’s heritage reception at an early stage in Germany is considered.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, world literature, reception, globalisation, naturalism, neo-romanticism, expressionism.

1. Introduction

Today’s world globalisation leads to increase in number of intercultural contacts in various spheres of life. Literature always played the leading role in the dialogue with another cultures and in the process of globalisation. The term “world literature” that was first used by Wolfgang von Goethe, referred to the dissemination of literature from and to countries across the globe.

In order to illustrate the importance of the writer’s creative heritage in Europe for deeper awareness of the foreign culture, specificity of the early stage of F.M. Dostoevsky’s work reception in Germany will be analysed.

2. Methodology

One of the principal method is used to outline the peculiarities of F.M. Dostoevsky’s work reception in Germany is a historical analyse of the critical works. The paper summarised translations released in 1846 – 1921 and numerous reviews published in German periodicals. The suggested approach shows the main reasons of F.M. Dostoevsky’s popularity in Germany.

3. Discussion

No other country outside Russia did F.M. Dostoevsky live so long as in Germany. In Germany Dostoevsky wrote the first chapter of his novel *Crime and Punishment* (“*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*”). Impressions of play in the casinos of Wiesbaden, Bad Homburg und Baden-Baden were fixed in the novel *The Gambler* (“*Igrok*”). Large parts of *Demons* (“*Besy*”) were written by Dostoevsky in Dresden.

Formally, Dostoevsky entered Germany in the second half of the 19th century, the period when a new literary movement *naturalism* was on the top of popularity. In this period the name of Dostoevsky first appeared in 1846 in the article by Ferdinand Leve in German literary monthly “*Sankt-Petersburgische Zeitung*”. In this article the author compares the novel *Poor Folk* (“*Bednye ljudi*”) of famous Russian writer with Goethe’s *Verter* (“*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*”). In a short period after publication the novel *Poor Folk* in Russian almanac *St. Petersburg Collection* (1846), the German translator Wilhelm Wolfsohn (1820-1860) published parts of Dostoyevsky’s novel in “*Sankt-Petersburgische Zeitung*”. 17 years later first edition of the Dostoevsky’s novel *Notes from Underground* (“*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*”) was published by Volfgang Gerhard, but this translation didn’t gain a positive reception of Germans [1]. “Symptomatically, it turned out to be a commercial disaster: the lack of success forced the publishing house to sell more than one hundred issues of *Notes from Underground* (“*Aus dem Todten Hause*”, 1864) as scrap paper” 5].

New movement in Germany – *naturalism* developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries caused revolution in literature. In this period Russian literature and works of Dostoevsky especially were at the centre of critics’ and readers’ attention. Novel *Crime and Punishment* focused on the main aspects of human life (such as divine love, crime and its consequences, the power of suffering, the power of fate, morality and right) gained in this period more popularity. For the most part this favour was connected with the name of Wilhelm Henckel (1825—1910). In 1882 in Leipzig W. Henckel first translated and started releasing a series of *Crime and Punishment* under the title “*Raskolnikow*”. Thanks to Henkel’s promotion campaign and after receiving favorable reviews of critics reading public in Germany knew the name of the outstanding Russian writer. In this period Dostoevsky is regarded as one of the greatest humanists and psychologists [1]. Deep philosophy, extraordinary realism, and representation of social problems in *Crime and Punishment* influenced numerous German translations of Dostoevsky’s works. In 1884 Dostoyevsky’s largest work *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat’ja Karamazovy*) was translated in German anonymous. One year later in 1885 the novel *Humiliated and Insulted* (“*Unizhennye i oskorblennye*”) devoted to the theme of the explicative value of suffering was translated in German by Constantin Jürgens. Later translations of other works by Dostoevsky were published in Germany: *The Adolescent* (“*Junger Nachwuchs*”, Wilhelm Friedrich, 1886), *Demons* (“*Die Besessenen*”, Herbert Putze, 1988), *Idiot* (“*Der Idiot*”, August Scholz, 1889). In fact, the first German translations were concerned about macro-structural adequacy, but the novel *The Humiliated and Insulated* was seriously abridged. Generally speaking, Germany became a country where the European fame of Dostoevsky began: translations of *Crime and Punishment* appeared in Croat and Czech (1882-1884), Swedish (1883), Danish (1884), Norwegian (1884), Dutch (1885), English (1886), Polish (1887), Serbian (1888), Italian (1889) etc [3]. In 1888 appeared the second translation of novel *Crime and Punishment* (“*Schuld und Sühne*”) made by Hans Moser. There were 5 impressions of his translation in 1905, 1925, 1957, 1960. In fact it indicated not only the quality of translation, but also the popularity of Dostoevsky.

It is remarkable, that French culture and *The Russian Novel* by Viscount Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé (published in 1886) played a significant role in further Dostoevsky’s popularisation in

Germany. E.M. de Vogue (1848–1910) tried to promote Russian-French working for the French Embassy in Saint Petersburg. His book *The Russian Novel* [4] became recognition worldwide and especially in Germany [3]. The book described different periods of Russian literature and showed the remarkable representatives of realism – N.V. Gogol, I.S. Turgenev, F.M. Dostoevsky and L.N. Tolstoy. In fact, the leading German and French literary critics presented Dostoevsky as master of the humiliated and insulted suffered from prolixity, they underlined that his idiosyncrasy lacked elegance, and that after *Crime and Punishment* his art fell into decline. But they also believed that psychologism and philanthropy as well as new realistic literary model presented in Dostoevsky's works could avert the European literary crisis [5].

Neo-romanticism was a new movement in Germany developed in the 90's of 19th century. *Neo-romanticism* paved the way to new interpretations of Dostoevsky's novels. Critics and readers in Germany paid attention to the legend of "Russian soul", interpreted in German romantic traditions and "Dostoevsky's power of insight into the lower depths and the higher yearnings of the human soul was particularly Russian, born at once with the Russian people's intimate acquaintance with suffering and their unusual vitality of character" [5]. Nina Hoffman, the author of the first Dostoevsky's biographical book published in 1898, presented to German public especial peculiarities of Russian people with their generous nature and sincere heart. Thesis about "Russian soul" and new philosophical problematic in works by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900) inspired a renewed interest to Dostoevsky. Friedrich Nietzsche in his philosophy held a pessimistic view on modern society and believed some people were able to become superior individuals through the use of "will power". In this connection the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky, moral dilemmas of Rodion Raskolnikov, and Raskolnikov's idea of murder permission in pursuit of a higher purpose were newly reconsidered. Exactly in period of *neo-romanticism* Dostoevsky's works were evaluated comprehensively and fully [1].

It is remarkable that after the Russian Revolution of 1905 German critics and readers concentrated their attention on political and social problems described in Dostoevsky's novels. Social upheavals, destruction of bourgeois ideals, and the Great October Socialist Revolution stimulated expressionist movement and intense interest in Dostoevsky's works in Germany. *Expressionism* originated in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century and tried to present the meaning of emotional experience rather than physical reality. Expressionists dramatised the struggle against bourgeois values and established authority, set new rules for a new world. The idea of vitalism, brotherhood, and love for one's neighbour in modernist philosophy drew German and Russian literature together. The German reception in this period is based on an emphatic understanding of the metaphysical, political, historical, social and religious dimensions of man's existence in Dostoevsky's world. In demand were critical works and papers about Dostoevsky by Hesse, Lucka, Zweig, and Kafka. At the beginning of 20th Dostoevsky's "Crime and punishment" was of great value for the Social Democratic Party of Germany and proletariat [1].

At the beginning of the 20th century two publishing houses translated and published Complete edition of Dostoevsky's works: "Piper" (1906-1919), "Insel" (1912-1920). Dostoevsky has influenced numerous German-language writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Döblin, Franz Kafka, Hermann Hesse. At the beginning of the 20th century the most famous novel *Crime and Punishment* was translated at least 3 times: Wilhelm Thal (1903), Woldemar Jensen (1907), Adam Kotulski (1907).

4. Conclusion

Summing up the results, we have to admit that the specificity of the early stage of F.M. Dostoevsky's work reception in Germany was determined by a number of factors: the continuity of Russian and German cultures, the importance of eternal problems of humanity described in Dostoevsky's works, and the influence of Vogue's book. The popularity of Dostoevsky reaches its highest point in 1921. The Complete edition of Dostoevsky's works came in 25 volumes, over 68 translations of separate works were published.

The suggested analysis of the German Dostoevsky's reception gives the opportunity to elicit the main tendencies of intercultural dialogue between Russia and Germany, and explain the principles of German-Russian cross-cultural communication.

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